APPRAISAL OF A PROGRAM OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN MURPHY HIGH SCHOOL, MOBILE, ALABAMA

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This field study was a project in educational engineering. The report deals with the description, analysis, evaluation, and recording of significant phases and developments in the initiation and promotion of this project in Murphy High School, Mobile, Alabama, where the writer was principal during the time of the project's implementation. The study, which was conducted from September, 1946, until June, 1949, involved the conceiving, validating, planning, initiating, promoting, and appraising of a developmental program of curriculum revision directed toward the establishment of a "common learnings" course in this high school.

Murphy, the largest secondary school in the South, is a part of the unit system embracing all of Mobile County. Its enrollment for 1948-49 was 4,182 pupils under the supervision of a staff of 172 persons. The curriculum of the school, at the beginning of the study, was of the "constants-electives" type with enrichment being sought through a variety of courses and a program of student activities.

The essential elements in this project were that a functional curriculum, conceived and validated on the basis of advanced study, was to be established in a practical school situation; that the problems encountered in so doing and the factors affecting its success were to be described and analyzed; and that the effectiveness of the program thus established would be appraised in the light of acceptable objectives to the extent possible under actual school conditions.

The curriculum initiated on an experimental basis at Murphy was designed to provide for an activity period; for a band of time devoted to the "common learnings" and to physical education and health; for three periods during which the pupil studied the usual specialized subjects under guidance; and for a period in which guidance and other personnel services were available.

This curriculum was designed to provide the pupils with an opportunity to make a direct attack upon the developmental tasks of youth and the unresolved problems variously associated with the essential social processes. The "common learnings" phase of this planned curriculum was to be problem-centered and was regarded as being of primary importance. It was felt that the advantages of the planned curriculum were that: it placed first things first; it focused directly upon the real problems of youth in their culture; it provided for a common body of integrating experiences; and, while it provided for the "social cement" of a common approach to problems, it also allowed for the necessary differentiation.

In order to test further the value of this curriculum which had been

conceived and validated on the basis of advanced study, the writer proposed to set up an experimental block of students and teachers in the sophomore class at Murphy to be kept together, insofar as this would be possible in keeping with the democratic procedures to which the staff was committed, for the three years of their high school attendance. Additional features of this proposal were that a continuous analysis of pertinent factors involved in such an engineering project, as well as a final appraisal at the end of the field study, would be made and that necessary modifications resulting from on-the-job developments would be accounted for.

This proposed curriculum was established in Murphy in the fall of 1947 with two hundred ten representative pupils and seven teachers after a year of study and preparation on the part of the faculty. Every effort was made to maintain democratic procedures at all stages of implementing the program. Teachers entered the experimentation on a voluntary basis; pupils were selected from a volunteer list; and parents were consulted as fully as possible. Since no serious faculty or community opposition existed at the end of the first year of experimentation, additional core groups were established in the succeeding sophomore classes. At the time of this report, five hundred forty pupils were scheduled in eighteen core groups.

A control group, matched with the experimental pupils on the basis of age, sex, grade level, intelligence scores, reading level, achievement scores, and socio-economic background, also was established for purposes of insuring the psychic security of the teachers rather than for controlled experimentation.

Many problems were encountered in establishing the program and there were failures as well as partial successes. The school was large and it was difficult to keep the sizable faculty informed and working together on the problem. The community, one of the oldest in the United States, was steeped in tradition and conservative in its mores. There was a dearth of teachers trained in the requisite techniques for successfully handling such a program. There was, too, the usual resistance to be expected from the entrenched interests of subject-matter specialists.

A number of favorable factors, however, served to counteract the effect of many of these problems and contributed materially toward making the experimentation possible. The faculty had made a study of pupil failures in 1945-46 and its revelations helped produce a state of readiness for further study. The city was deluged with war workers and military personnel for several years with consequent disturbance to established mores. A significant survey of the school system was con-

ducted for two years by the staff of the Mobile schools in cooperation with the University of Alabama and the State Department of Education and its activities stimulated an educational ferment which led to the development of an extensive in-service education program and conditioned the teachers to change.

In order for the writer to be able to initiate and promote this program of curriculum revision many things were required of him. A considerable number of meetings were held with faculty committees and the entire staff, with experimenting teachers, with pupils, and with parents. A number of carefully prepared bulletins were developed relating to the program. An in-service education program had to be fostered within the school in order for the experimenting teachers to gain the necessary competencies and insights for best results in the core groups. Questionnaires were given to all members of the faculty and to eight hundred parents. A chart sketching the scope and sequence of the curriculum was worked out with the participating teachers. Various tests and inventories were given the participating pupils and other means of evaluating the effectiveness of the program were employed. Arrangements were made for teachers to make observational trips to other schools; staff members of the state university were brought in to help these teachers; and a specialist in core curriculum work was secured for a three-day visit with the staff. Talks were made before parent and civic groups, panel discussions were organized with experimental pupils and teachers for these same groups, and newspaper accounts were prepared regularly to acquaint the community with various activities of the "common learnings" groups.

Appraisal of the effectiveness of this project necessitated not only an evaluation of the development of the participating pupils but also of the degree of success attained in establishing the curriculum program in the school. While the staff of the school recognized that considerable caution was essential in attempting to evaluate the development of pupils in the kind of curriculum undertaken at Murphy in view of the fact that the most worth-while products of learning are intangible, as careful an appraisal was made as was possible. The pupils were given intelligence, reading, and various achievement tests; interest and personality inventories; problem check lists; and other standardized instruments for discovering information about pupils. Written products of these pupils were examined and carefully compared. Evaluative letters from the pupils and teachers were compiled and anecdotal records were kept.

As a result of these and many other observations of the pupils, those members of the staff more directly associated with the experimentation

were convinced that the best results were obtained through a program of this kind. Many other faculty members, less directly related to the activity, were able to see enough advantage from the course to become staunch converts.

An appraisal of the degree of success attained in establishing the program in the school disclosed a number of substantial achievements during the period of the study. A "common learnings" course had been established in the school with a sufficient quota of students participating in enough core groups to be of significance to the school. Early problems had been overcome to a great extent and these initial difficulties had served to show the staff how to handle the program better. A total of fifty-one teachers was actively engaged in some phase of the experimentation. Important subsidiary studies had been completed and others were under way. Faculty opposition had faded and no community opposition had arisen.

A number of procedures necessary as next steps in implementing the program more fully were identified. The program apparently was established sufficiently well to warrant the requirement of only the "common learnings" core within another year. Additional efforts were needed to bring the entire faculty into the program. More work was needed in building resource units and in assembling useful materials. Further activities directed toward engendering a wider acceptance of the project among pupils not in the program and within the community were in order.

Chapter I of the report defines the scope of the field study; indicates the point of view which influenced the writer to undertake a program of curriculum revision in the school; and outlines the nature of the contemplated project. The imperative need for presenting too severe a lag between educational practices and developments in the social scene in order to safeguard our democracy is pointed out as one of the chief reasons for continuous appraisal of curriculum practices and constant experimentation.

Chapter II describes the nature of the learning process and indicates the place of the school in personal and societal development. The inadequacy of traditional curriculum practices for developing the kind of mature persons needed as contributing members of a democratic social order is documented from many sources in the literature. The kind of planned curriculum which should result in a more functional program is described and its advantages identified. The contributions of educational writers in identifying the personal and societal problems with which the "common learnings" core should deal are listed rather fully and a number of sources which proved helpful in clarifying the direction

and pattern of necessary curriculum changes are given. As a final part of the chapter, the importance of the teacher in helping to implement the kind of curriculum essential for societal good health is emphasized.

Two important factors which developed in the Mobile school system were of material assistance in making the Murphy experimentation possible. These were the Mobile Cooperative Survey, sponsored jointly by the Bureau of Educational Research of the University of Alabama, the Alabama State Department of Education, and the Mobile School Commission, and the county-wide in-service education program which resulted from this survey. The work of the Mobile Survey and the activities of teachers in the in-service program constitute the subject matter of Chapter III. The responsibilities of the Murphy principal as chairman of the Central Planning Committee of the in-service program for 1947-48 and later as a member of this committee are described and the extent of participation in this program by the Murphy faculty is indicated.

Chapter IV is devoted to a description of the Murphy faculty; to the problems encountered with them in initiating the program of curriculum revision; and to methods employed in keeping the staff adequately informed and favorably disposed toward the experimentation. The one hundred seventy-two members of the staff were well-trained in subject fields and were relatively mature teachers. A questionnaire submitted to them at the beginning of the study revealed a tendency among them to express liberal views toward educational procedures but to hold to traditional practices. This survey revealed further that they had very confused ideas as to the nature of guidance and the curriculum; that altogether too few of them had been to college within the past ten years; and that a majority of these teachers made no regular practice of reading professional materials.

The principal problems encountered with the faculty resulted from their lack of acquaintance with recent professional thinking as well as the lack of opportunity to observe experimental practices; from the hostility of entrenched subject-matter specialists toward encroachment upon their special interests; and from the very size of the faculty. Additional problems encountered grew out of the desire of the staff to return to "normalcy" after the war influx of pupils; the conservative mores of the entire community; and the feeling of having "arrived" which some teachers acquire upon being elected to work in so large a secondary school.

In spite of the factors indicated here, the Murphy faculty is composed of excellent teachers genuinely interested, for the most part, in youth. Their study of pupil failures in 1945-46; the inadequacies revealed by

the Mobile Survey; and better acquaintance with recent professional thinking which resulted from the in-service program all served as important measures in creating a questioning attitude among them toward established practices. Carefully prepared staff bulletins were found to be very helpful in consolidating faculty sentiment and in keeping them informed of developments. Other means used to work with these teachers included faculty meetings, small study groups, panel discussions, faculty observations of activities, and the use of subject-matter specialists on call with the core groups.

The actual initiation of the project in the school may be traced to a small study group of seven teachers organized by the principal at the beginning of the second semester in 1946-47. This study group met once a week for a semester and was established officially as the Curriculum Committee toward the late spring. Chapter V describes this committee's work during the period of study; gives a number of excerpts from committee minutes; reviews its efforts to delimit the scope and sequence of the "common learnings" course and to define the criteria by means of which problems in the core period would be selected; and presents a picture of the other studies undertaken by the group.

The seven core teachers who began the actual experimentation were selected from the social studies department and the project was begun by infiltration into this department. Later, teachers from the fields of science, commercial studies, and English were brought into the core program. Chapter VI is given over to an account of these teachers and to a description of how the program was handled.

Chapter VII gives data about the pupils in the experimentation; describes the activities in some units in detail in order that the groups might be seen in action; contains a number of excerpts from evaluative letters of these pupils in order to show their reaction to the program; and discusses other methods of evaluating their development. Attention also is given to the place of the specialized subjects in this project and to the guidance and personnel band of time in the planned curriculum.

A number of conclusions were reached in consequence of actively initiating an educational program in a practical school situation and of attempting to critically appraise developments as the program unfolded. While the appraisal, revision, and development of the curriculum obviously constitute continuing charges upon the faculty and participating community of a school, this is likely to become generally accepted only as enough leadership in the individual schools recognizes the nature of educational engineering and develops the competence and courage to undertake this phase of social engineering.

Educational engineering, as a form of social engineering, is no slight task, however. Since what goes on in the school has deep and serious social consequences, changes in it can come about only through the reconstruction of personalities and of community relationships.

The personnel of the school probably constitutes the major problem in initiating a new program. There are factors of previous training and experience, of the necessity for facing up to a reorganization of practices, and of emotional impediments which constitute definite barriers to progress unless handled with great adroitness.

The same procedures, however, which are important in the core groups for functional learning and the "growing of a group" are equally applicable to teachers.

In the learning process which teachers already on the job must undergo, a well-organized, active in-service education program is essential.

Not all good teachers make good core teachers. Factors of personality, interest in youth, and an understanding of the learning process are more important than the academic background of the teacher.

Every means available must be used to keep the faculty and community informed of developments and participating as fully as possible in the project.

Although there will be temptations to set the experimental group off from the regular students and faculty for convenience in such matters as scheduling and the like, the better part of wisdom is to make the new program as much a part of the school as possible.

There must be adequate time for the teachers involved in the experiment to have opportunity to plan together. They should have suitable rooms for the activity and adequate materials on hand or easily accessible.

It is preferable that the principal of the school be the active promoter of the curriculum program. If he is not, then he must be convinced, at least, of its importance and interested in its success.

VITA

Raymond G. Wilson was born in Ripley, Tennessee, on February 24, 1905. He graduated from the Martin, Tennessee, High School in 1923 and from Hall-Moody Junior College of the same town in 1926. He received his B.S. degree from Memphis State College in 1933; his Ed.M. degree from Duke University in 1942; and his Ed.M. degree from the University of Illinois in 1946.

From 1926 until 1930, he served as principal and coach in rural high schools of Obion County, Tennessee. In 1930 he became assistant principal of the junior high school and one of the coaches in the senior high school at Union City, Tennessee. He became principal of the Union City Junior High School in 1938 and continued in this position until he became principal of Murphy High School, Mobile, Alabama, in 1945.

He is a member of the legislative committee of the Alabama Education Association and president of the Division of Principals of that organization. During 1948-49, he was president of the Administrative Division of the Mobile Education Association. He is the author of an article entitled "Veterans as School Leaders" which was published in *School Activities* in February, 1946; of "How One High School Handles Its Veterans' Problem" which appeared in the *Nations Schools* for November, 1946; of "Summer School for Veterans" published in *Clearing House* in April, 1947; and of "A Thousand Parents for Open House" which was published in the November, 1947, issue of *School Activities*.

He was formerly president of Alpha Tau Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi and of Beta Alpha Field Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa. In addition to belonging to these two professional organizations, he is a member of Kappa Phi Kappa.